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Can The Church Lead?

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Can The Church Lead?

My father was a minister in the Christian Church in a day when to be a minister meant to be a leader. I suppose he was a minister because he was by nature a leader and because he grew up in the Christian religion and so he combined religion and leadership. This combination led him to the foreign mission field, and for fifty years he was a leader of men in China. It was not a peaceful life for him or for his family, for to be a leader meant that though he had followers there were plenty who would not follow, and his life was an embattled one. But it was a successful life and when he died in his eightieth year—to his disgust, for he was planning new campaigns—he regretted none of it.

We who grew up as his children, therefore, were early accustomed to thinking of leadership as coming from the Church. In our community in China Christians were expected to take definite stands of leadership in all matters. If the members of my father's various churches scattered through the Chinese cities and towns in our region did not take such leadership he did not hesitate to inquire into the nature of their Christianity. For him the practice of religion was inseparable from its profession. In this tradition he reared us. It was a hard tradition if what one wanted was peace and comfort in daily life, but it made its mark upon its day.

I may be forgiven therefore if I came back to my own country expecting similar leadership from the Church here. That I did not find it except in isolated cases did not at first much disturb me. Times were changed, I thought. Moral leadership was perhaps to be found now in other places in our modern society. Or, I thought, it may be that the influence of the Christian is only more diffused in our society, so that it is not so much the Church corporate that works, as its representatives in

secular life. We may have the Christian as groceryman, the Christian as teacher, the Christian as scientist, and so to all parts of life. This seemed to me valuable, for thus the twin pillars of the ideals of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man upon which the Church has always been founded could become the foundations, too, of our society.

Whether there has been this diffusion I do not know. But I do know that if there has been it is not strong enough for this hour of crisis. Individual Christians scattered through our life have obviously not influenced our society enough to be able now to take the leadership. They do not lead our people as Christian individuals. No, they have even come to be too much like those who do not profess the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. The Christian who in his community should be the first to take his stand upon those twin pillars of the Church denies them daily in his actions, even as do those whom he should lead. The Christian himself is not free from the prejudices which are most unchristian and insofar as he is not free, he cannot lead others. And yet the time has come when it is imperative that moral leadership be found somewhere in our nation if we are to win the war and insure the peace after three centuries of failure.

For today it is obvious that although we are increasingly in earnest about this war, we are not yet putting forth our full effort to win it. This is not through lack of wish to win, but through lack of will to win. Every true American knows that we must win, lest we lose that for which our nation was founded. Intellectually this is accepted by all who believe in American democracy. If energy could spring from intellectual conviction our war efforts, individual and national, would swing into full and unified production, and those who do not believe in democracy would soon find themselves defined and on the wrong side. But energy does not spring out of intel-

lectual conviction. Its source is deeper in the human frame. Intellectual conviction may be the spark which lights the tinder which supplies the energy, but it is no more than that. The will to act finally comes out of the heart, not the head.

Why is it that as yet this will has not been stirred in our people? We are going through all the proper motions for war, but the all-out determination to win has not yet taken hold of us. The cause for this spiritual apathy is simple—there are emotions stronger in us than the will to win this war for freedom and human equality. For, basically, this is of course what this war is about and the reason we are not yet generating full energy is that we know it is what the war is about but we do not want and are not willing to allow our knowledge to pass over into the seat of energy in us, because of conflicting emotions there. That is, we cannot fight to win a war for freedom so long as practically we do not want freedom for all peoples, and we cannot fight to win a war for human equality if we do not actually want human equality. Bluntly, the man or woman who is determined to keep alive the traditions of empire in Asia or Africa is putting imperialism ahead of winning the war, and the man or woman who insists on Jim Crowism and total Oriental exclusion at home is putting race prejudice ahead of winning the war. And if these two are to be the pillars of our society instead of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, we had better know it and stop wasting our people in this war for freedom and human equality. We cannot possibly win it.

Here then is the spiritual confusion in which Americans now are and out of which we must somehow be led. We are faced with the necessity of fighting a war for principles in which we say we believe but which actually we do not want to practice. We talk about the American way of life and we go on tolerating and encouraging and demanding Jim Crowism and Oriental exclu-

sion which are the Nazi way of life. We can never get pure energy out of such a conflict. The spark is applied to wet tinder. There will be no flame.

The truth is that we have not yet carried the war into the places where it really hurts. We can give up sugar, but we cannot give up segregation. We are willing to ration our gasoline but we do not want to insist that colored labor shall have equal rights with white labor. We consent to the heaviest of taxes for military warfare but we are not willing to treat the Chinese as we treat the British. We are ready, that is, to give up anything material, but nothing else. Unfortunately democracy cannot be bought with material goods, nor is human equality to be paid for with silver. Democracy can only be won by the sacrifice of everything that is undemocratic, and human equality can only be had by the will to have it at all costs.

The material sacrifice is easy, the spiritual sacrifice is hard and it is here that our people must be led. For the easy material sacrifice is not enough and the hard spiritual sacrifice must be made before our full energy is behind this war. Where shall we get the strength to dig into our own secret places and root out the enemy within ourselves? Where are our moral leaders? Now if ever the Church must provide them, both for its own sake and for the sake of our people. For if the Church cannot at this moment see the issue clearly and simply enough to lead the people to the realization of its age-old belief in the Fatherhood of God, by proclaiming its determination to practice the Brotherhood of Man through the refusal any longer to condone imperialism and race prejudice, then the Church is dead, and from that death there is no resurrection. Never, I think, in history, have human issues been as clear as they are today when millions of people in our own country and in all parts of the world cry out for one thing—freedom. And the only way to establish freedom as a way of life upon the earth is to deter-

mine that men are indeed brothers, and that all shall be treated alike, without regard to color or class. Where is the Church that it does not come forward and declare itself not only as a body corporate, but through its own members in the separate practice of their individual lives?

Nor can the Church delay. Before our eyes this war for democracy may turn into a war for new empire. It is high time that we realize our own danger. For it is a danger when there are Americans who are not willing to declare openly the principle of human equality and are not willing to practice the principle. We have here in our own country the strongest possible elements of danger to democracy, and there is little time left in which to recognize them and to stay their increasing power. Those who say that we are not fighting for anything except our American way of life—are they better than those who fight for any other way of life, if both those ways of life include the subjection of peoples to their rule? Will not such a way of life in America lead simply to more war as it has everywhere else in the world? Is our way of life to be immune from evil consequences if it contains within itself the same seeds of prejudice and greed and selfishness that have made all treaties of peace fail in the last three centuries? It is folly to think that we can escape.

And can we hope to escape fascism itself in this country if there are those here speaking openly and loudly the very dogmas that brought about the fascist regime in Germany? Those dogmas are: first, race prejudice on a basis even broader here than the race prejudice in Germany; second, impatience with the slow methods of democratic processes; third, greed in business and labor; and fourth, the baiting of all those who question race prejudice and intolerance and greed. The beginning of fascism has always been the attempt to suppress intelligent inquiry and the moment this suppression is successful, intellectuals are put into prison and killed and the

books are burned. Can it happen here? It can happen here, in the name of communism or fascism or lack of patriotism or by any other name.

Yet there are many who wait for leadership toward true democracy. All over our country there are the young, ready to be led out of old prejudices and dead traditions. The young are ready to believe in human equality. Even in the South there are young white people, men and women, who say, "We are ready to treat the colored young people as our friends and equals—it is the older people who are clinging to traditions." There are others, good people who have not the strength to stand alone in their goodness. They are confused and they must be led out of their confusion to know that the basic issues in this war are simple and within the mental comprehension of all. Whether they are within the practical application of all depends upon the strength of our determination now not to repeat the mistakes of the centuries, and for that determination we need moral leadership. Millions in Asia and Europe and Africa, too, wait for the leadership in this war which will declare itself for freedom and human equality for all. If we cannot find that leadership then this war will end again in futile peace.

For during the last three hundred years there have been ten treaties made in Europe alone, all calling for a "Christian peace"—that is, a peace based on human brotherhood. Yet not one of them has produced this "Christian peace," from the Treaty of Westphalia to the Treaty of Versailles. They have been intellectual treaties, and the men who made them paid lip service to the idea of human equality. Even President Wilson was not willing to include racial equality in the Treaty of Versailles. Yet any treaty which is not based upon human equality and implemented on human equality will bring the world no peace. Treaties therefore have been nothing but intellectual agreements, and they have been denied and made

useless by the prejudices of those who would not observe them. And who can observe any treaty for peace who is not willing to give up his own personal prejudices as part of the necessary sacrifice? And if we have not the moral energy to make this sacrifice even to win the war how can we hope to win the peace?

Now, if ever, the Church ought to furnish the leadership for our people to make the sacrifice of our prejudices and our greed which through all the centuries we have not been strong enough to make. If the Church cannot produce the necessary moral leadership then religion is dead indeed. It may be that religion is dead, and if it is, we had better know it and set ourselves to try to discover other sources of moral strength before it is too late.

But how is it that the Church today does not recognize even its own danger? The only hope of freedom for religion is in the freedom of all mankind. Does the Church in our country think it will escape the fate of the Church in the fascist countries if it does not now take the moral leadership necessary for its own life as well as the life of the nation? Yes, perhaps it is true that religion is already dead and what we have is nothing but the shell of what might have been alive and is no more.

And yet, I am loath to believe that the Church is really dead. For I know the Church is no separate entity in itself. It is only men and women of a certain mind and temper and spirit, who declare in themselves their belief in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. But perhaps they believe only intellectually and not in their hearts and so they sleep. If they are only sleeping, then let them awake. If the Church in our country does not lead now, it may never have the opportunity again. Now is the moment of crisis.

How shall we awaken this sleeping Church? Alas, I know no other way except the way by which men and women are awakened anywhere. Will men and women

of the Church practice what they profess? Those who say they believe in the Brotherhood of Man, will they act as they believe? Can the Church rise to this new greatness? But so to rise again means that within the Church itself there must be the determination to sacrifice everything which stands in the way of such greatness—that is, individual men and women who are the Church must be willing to sacrifice their own prejudices first before they can become the leaders of others for freedom and human equality.

Is there this life in the Church? I do not know. But if there is not, then indeed we must look elsewhere for the light.

